

MAYOR LANA MOOK
STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS
Given at the February 19, 2013 City Council Meeting

Distinguished members of the El Mirage City Council, Dr. Isom, residents, guests, and staff, thank you for attending this meeting and the 2013 State of the City address. As the Mayor of El Mirage, I am honored to address you this evening.

Since being elected your Mayor a little more than two years ago, I have been privileged to be part of a transformation in El Mirage - one that I feel, once and for all, sets aside the perception of El Mirage as an unremarkable place with an uncertain future. This transformation has taken on many forms in the last two years, which I will tell you about during the course of this address. But most importantly, I want you to know that this transformation would not be possible without the support of El Mirage residents who believed that the time for transformation had come.

Since its incorporation in 1951, El Mirage has transcended its rural beginnings to become a suburban community of more than 32,000 residents. The City's affordable housing, small-town feel, and proximity to Phoenix have attracted young working families seeking a first home; retirees looking for community cohesion and a less hurried pace; entrepreneurs seeking expansion into new markets; and individuals disenfranchised by recent economic events, who yearned for a new beginning. All are welcome here! Those same qualities that attracted so many here in recent years have also helped sustain the City's long-time residents, many of whom trace their family histories in El Mirage back four or five generations. To them, let me offer a special thank you on behalf of our City Council, for giving us the historical perspective and personal insights that helped frame our priorities as we began charting a new course for El Mirage two years ago.

The Council members seated before you tonight are individuals with an enduring commitment to find the right solutions for our community, not the easy ones. They ask the difficult questions; they take the long view; and they believe good government means having the courage to move toward the prosperous future that El Mirage voters entrusted to us. Such trust is not taken lightly.

The historic recession that began in 2008 and left no one in this country unaffected, spurred numerous austerity measures by this Council in late 2010 and early 2011 that, today, have translated into careful, sensible recovery:

- *Discretionary spending for training, travel, outside consultants, and other expenditures was drastically reduced.*
- *Staff responsibilities were streamlined and departments combined to minimize operational overhead.*
- *The Council adopted the City's first-ever Five-Year Capital Improvements Plan to ensure City resources for improvements remained focused on what we must do and on what we could afford.*
- *Above all, the Council wanted to ensure that residents' quality of life was not compromised. Therefore, we adopted additional goals to help stabilize utility and sanitation rates, support continuing efforts to attract new businesses and new jobs, support recreational facilities and community events, and ensure residents received the caliber of public safety prescribed by a City of our size and our needs.*

By mid-2011, these measures had helped reduce the General Fund budget by more than \$2.2 million, and enabled us to set aside \$6 million in reserve funding to offset shortfalls in revenue collections.

As sales tax collections began to improve in the latter part of the year (3% ahead of budget), the Council felt the time was right to authorize construction to begin on the new fire station approved by voters 2-1/2 years earlier. Council also authorized reinstatement of six firefighter positions eliminated by the previous administration.

And Council kept its pledge to residents to place barriers at entrances to eight culverts in the Agua Fria wash, removing those places where the potential for harm, especially to our children, was much too great.

El Mirage was finally turning the corner financially under a commitment centered on innovations and efficiencies in service delivery.

One of the important leadership challenges of this Council is to find ways to develop key relationships among public and private entities in support of our City's development goals. And to do so in a manner that makes sound business sense, while not compromising our role as stewards of this community's future. I am pleased to inform you that one of the most important such partnerships for this City is now rooted in firm ground . . . the partnership with Luke Air Force Base. When this Council was seated two years ago, each of us made a pledge to bring good sense over politics to our dialogues concerning Luke.

Through numerous discussions with our own citizens; military officials; and leaders of neighboring communities; as well as attendance at technical presentations regarding flight contours, noise effects, and other elements of Luke's training of fighter pilots in the skies over El Mirage, the Council and I confirmed Luke to be a vital asset without equal for our City and our state.

Thanks to Luke's presence, we in Arizona are the beneficiaries of 8,000 jobs and \$2 billion in revenue, and certainly the immeasurable safety and security of a premier military installation as our neighbor. In 2012, I was selected to co-chair the Luke West Valley Council. The Council is made up of elected officials from twelve cities, and together with Luke Air Force Base and County Board of Supervisors representatives, we work together to find mutually beneficial solutions in support of communities and Luke's operations.

Strategic partner engagement has also spurred the Council's participation with other groups, as we plan for a new economic reality in El Mirage.

For example, I serve on the League of Arizona Cities and Towns' Executive Committee; the Valley Metro RPTA Committee; the MAG Regional Council; and the Westmarc Executive Committee.

Councilman David Shapera is a highly visible member of parent-teacher associations in our school district, ensuring unified efforts are being made by all stakeholders with respect to the physical, mental, and social well-being of our children.

Councilman Roy Delgado chairs Maricopa County's Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) to ensure federal funds are distributed to smaller communities like ours for housing and infrastructure projects. He also chairs the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Maricopa County Library District and is a board member of the Dysart Education Foundation.

Councilman Lynn Selby is a member of the Maricopa Association of Governments' Regional Domestic Violence Council. The council is made up of elected officials, along with representatives from law enforcement, health care, shelters and other stakeholders who provide a forum for coordinated action to address domestic violence in the MAG region.

Councilman Jim McPhetres serves on the Westmarc Water and Energy Committee.

Councilman Jack Palladino is the alternate El Mirage elected official on the CDAC and attends every meeting with Councilman Delgado. He also currently serves on the Council subcommittee which monitors progress on the construction of the new police station, and recently served on the Health Benefits Committee, which coordinated development of the Arizona Metropolitan Trust. The trust is a self-funded benefits plan designed to stem the rising cost of health benefits for municipal government employees including the City's own employees.

Vice Mayor Joe Ramirez serves as liaison for the White Tanks Little League and has served on a number of subcommittees. He also attends meetings when my schedule doesn't allow me to be present.

Dr. Spencer Isom, our City Manager, serves as vice chair of the MAG Management Committee. The committee determines how federal funds for transportation and other projects of regional significance can best be distributed to benefit the greatest number of citizens in the County.

Most Councilmembers have served on multiple subcommittees, so the list goes on, along with our collective determination to be at the table when decisions are made impacting El Mirage.

In 2012, something began disappearing from the daily public rhetoric about El Mirage. That 'something' was the apathetic notion that El Mirage was just okay, a place lacking inspiration . . . no big plans, too many challenges, true potential unexplored. Could it be that somehow, we had found a way to do more and be more with less than anyone expected? Yes, we had.

Thanks to a voter-approved sale of bonds, a new 22,000 square-foot police station and a 28,000 square-foot YMCA will be constructed just south of Gateway Park in 2013. Voters recognized that our Police Department was operating in outdated, temporary facilities not indicative of our expectations of them. I am happy to inform you that the new police station broke ground January 18th of this year. Voters also understood that residents needed a place like the 'Y' to be safe, healthy, and connected. 'Y' programming will include activities for all age groups. Groundbreaking for the new 'Y' will take place this April.

Many of you last September attended the dedication of the City's new 16,000 square foot fire station, also funded through a voter-approved bond in 2008.

As you may know, bonds are sold to investors to help finance the construction of most major facilities in cities and towns across the country. The soundness of bond investments is indicated by bond ratings assigned to municipalities by rating service providers such as Standard & Poors or Moody's. Bond ratings determine the cost to the City of borrowing bond funds. Last July, I accompanied City Manager Isom and our Finance Department management to San Francisco. There, we met with representatives of Standard & Poors and Moody's to lay out the case for the El Mirage bond rating. We discussed the City's funding reserves, financial management practices and policies, and debt levels. As a result, S & P assigned El Mirage an A+ rating, while Moody's assigned the City an A1 rating. Both ratings are rare, and translate to an expected savings of \$1.3 million over the 30-year life of the bonds, as well as lower tax levies and lower property taxes for residents in the long term.

Currently, El Mirage's debt is 100% voter approved and does not rely on sales tax revenues for repayment.

Gentry Park is one of the City's oldest landmarks, built more than 45 years ago amid our original downtown neighborhoods. Mindful of the significance of Gentry Park to families and children in our community, the Council approved its major renovation in 2012 including a new ball diamond, covered dugouts, a concession building, and new fencing - much of this funded by a grant from the Arizona Sports and Tourism Authority.

New waterlines downtown and the new Brisas well were also completed in 2012 to ensure quality water for the City for years to come.

Lennar Homes, a major builder in the U.S., constructed 83 new homes at the City's northern edge in 2012, and will be adding 90 homes this year, thanks to the Council's decision to discontinue impact fees normally imposed to help defray the cost of public services in new developments.

The average cost and square footage of homes in Lennar's Montecito Estates is \$159,000 and 2,100 square feet. The estimated sales tax from construction of these 173 homes is \$500,000. In addition, these homes will add approximately \$20 million in property value to the City when completed, which should lower your secondary property tax burdens by 15 to 20%.

Such pro-business initiatives are expected to continue expanding our economic base, and I am proud that Aaron's Rents, Valero, Auto Zone, and other firms selected El Mirage as a key location in their expansion plans during 2012.

In this day and age, Americans have gained new insight about the environment and their role in preserving it. Every community, no matter the size, must be committed to environmental stewardship to sustain the quality of life for both present and future generations.

In El Mirage, signs of our commitment have already begun to emerge. Solar paneled parking structures are installed at Gateway Park and the Senior Center. The panels generate 80% of each structure's electricity and were built at no upfront cost to the City. Our staff is already in discussions with solar partners for construction of similar structures at the new fire station, police station, and the YMCA.

We have a curbside recycling program in place that translates into less waste in our landfills and a cleaner City for all of us. The latest component of this program is the recycling of damaged trash receptacles implemented this year, so they too will no longer clutter the landfills.

Although current environmental damage to our streets cannot be reversed, staff has identified a pavement preservation process to extend the life of City roadways, mitigate dust, and lower costs over time. This preservation project is already underway on neighborhood streets.

Entering 2013, be assured the City budget is still our primary focus. We are committed to continued stability, knowing that planning, pursuing, and negotiating for the best possible outcomes for you are enduring obligations. This year, thanks to earlier cost-conscious measures, we begin our planning process with a General Fund budget balance of approximately \$13.5 million including reserves. Operating expenditures are relatively steady, and key partnerships enliven our future.

Soon, you will see improvements to Grand Avenue, most notably the realignment of Grand, Thunderbird, and Thompson Ranch Road thanks to partnerships with the Arizona Department of Transportation and the Maricopa Association of Governments. The realignment will bring safer traffic conditions and greater potential for economic expansion. Thunderbird Road at Dysart Road has already emerged as a hub for commerce. Therefore, the Council will pursue additional opportunities to develop it further.

Additional improvements are slated for Gentry Park including new lighting, shade structures, and picnic areas; and other smaller parks will see improvements as well including equipment and solar lighting.

And the City will be adding bulk trash pick-ups at curbside in a continuing effort to improve livability for all of us.

In closing tonight, let me extend my sincere thank you to my Council colleagues, Dr. Isom and his staff, and most importantly, the residents of El Mirage. It has been my

honor to serve as your mayor during the past two years. In that time, I have come to know that worthwhile progress is hard, very hard. But it comes from a belief that we in El Mirage want and deserve a more promising future. And if you share that belief with me, then you'll take the lessons of the past and learn from them, so that our City will no longer be the place on the way to somewhere else, but a welcoming destination ready to take its place among the best cities of our state.

Thank you and God bless.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lana Mook". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Lana" and "Mook" being capitalized and prominent.

*The Honorable Lana Mook
Mayor of El Mirage*